



Paper Dive by Grace Keely

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Characters: Billy H., OC

Pairings: Billy H./OC

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-03-22 23:22:25

Updated: 2018-03-29 06:30:20

Packaged: 2019-12-16 22:50:53

Rating: T

Chapters: 2

Words: 10,965

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: A wallflower story of how you fell for Billy Hargrove... all those years ago. It started off with the most typical of ways— he didn't know you and you didn't know him, but you couldn't ask for anything better than that. Until of course, you noticed he was reaching for cloud-nine, not knowing for the dive that comes after. And then, you also fell into it. 2 parts. Reader/Billy

1. Chapter 1

A/N: Hi guys! Here's... well, do I really need to explain why you guys are all here? I've already said everything I needed to say on the summary, so gather up folks and hopefully you enjoy this two-shot :)

Oh, and the setting starts a couple of years before Season 2, and it will go from there. No Supernatural, I guess?

Anyway, have fun!

Disclaimer: I do not own *Stranger Things*, or Billy's Character for that matter (wish I could though). If I got money out of this I would be in some Starbucks place, drinking all of their coffee with glasses on looking all cool and casual and chic, but instead I'm wallowed inside a shared bedroom with nothing but wineglass full of water.

Paper Dive

Billy Hargrove as a young kid was a silent guy. You still sometimes try to imagine that he would be that way when you grow up. There's just this... certain sense of charm in Billy that you're attracted to since you've met him in middle school. Sure, your first moment together wasn't exactly the typical "love at first sight" kind of deal. Both of you literally just bumped together on the hallway one day and then the two of you mumbled an apology to each other. You hid the awkward moment with a kind smile, but he just nodded politely at you and then the both of you went on your separate ways.

But then next day he was in your class, and you sat there right next to him. You wanted to say something, or maybe just introduce yourself, but you couldn't. His presence enough was just as intimidating as the tension that seeped through your brain, thinking about what to say or how would he react if you made a joke about the incident yesterday, but you thought the better of it and left it

alone for the rest of the hour.

It was probably the worst mistake you've ever done in your life.

Because you were ultimately a shy person, you've never really gotten the chance to talk to him after that. He was a new kid, you understood that he needed time to adjust himself to school society, so you decided to wait until he gets used to the transfer that you would introduce yourself. But the surprise it got you over his first week of stay when you heard that he got into the basketball team— well, you knew your chances were already blown at that point.

Cool kids would only hang out with other cool kids in your Californian school. You knew you weren't classified by the system as "cool", and you knew that people in sports team are always permanently branded as "cool" by association. You only sighed and let the possibility of ever getting that chance to know him go, and just wallow yourself in a pool of your own stupidity and lack of people skills. Only fate was kind enough that you still happen to sit next to him in a few classes, and your locker's only a few feet away from his.

You got to know him little by little because of that. His friends would often hang around his seat, talking and teasing each other over menial things. You even learned some of his quirks: how his teammates tried to coerce him to join parties, but he rarely accepts the offer. Or how he really didn't care about his status as a cool kid, only that he's thankful he gets out of the house more often. He had this smirk on his face every time he tried to express himself, and you wished you'd see it more often.

Because once the bell rang and people would return to their seats, you were the only one who could see it fade away.

Billy was an unpredictable person— a personality trait you'd like to describe to him a lot. You sometimes thought of the reason why. On days you see him all charged up and so ready for life that just by his presence it so happens to brighten up your mood as well. But then, there were times when you see him approach his locker, you see that there's a weight he often carries when he moves.

In one of those days, you decided to do something about it.

When Billy opened up his locker, knowing that you were only a few feet away, nondescriptly spending your time deciding which book you should take (even though you already knew what class was next), he was quite surprised when a small blue paper suddenly fell from the ground. He curiously picked it up, obviously not the type of person who would put trash to where it didn't belong, and then unfolded it.

"Put some energy into your step. Cheer up! It's a sunny day today. "

Billy initially thought it was some kind of prank the jocks would play to the new kid on the team, so he flipped it in the back to make sure there wasn't some kind of "sike" written on it. But then he noticed that the letters etched were a simple, feminine cursive.

You saw Billy softened and forced to hide a grin as he folded and placed it in one of the many pockets of his letterman. That'd put a smile on yours, and realizing by then, you vowed to do that little gesture whenever he comes to school in one of those moods.

For the rest of the day though, you had noticed that he'd perked up all little bit with his sullenness. His usual aura tends to rub off on other people that he barely made communication with them. Now, at least you could see him along the hallways, or outside in one of the field benches talking to his friends over something you couldn't really hear.

Seeing him like that, feeling like he's ready to take on the world again...

Things started off quite slowly after that. Every day you'd always thought of words you'd like to write down, collecting them in a small plastic box you piled in your locker. And then every time he comes to school feeling a little slumped, you would make sure to drop one off to him, either by his locker or his desk, always making sure that no one else was paying attention. Of course, his grayed day would surely lessen, and he would come back riding the day stronger than he ever was before.

You'd always hoped that those days would lessen, and it did. At least for some time.

Billy had a name in school. He was good at basketball and people looked up to him. You didn't. In a way, you thought of him like any other regular person. It's just that you probably wouldn't ever talk to him or even let him know that. You would only settle for stealing glances at him along the hallways, and sometimes you couldn't help but form up a cute blush that you hoped one day he would notice.

Funnily enough, he wasn't the infamous rascalion everyone often deemed him to be. He particularly wasn't among the most handsome you've met in your childhood memories. In fact, you were probably the only person to have ever remembered that he once had a stocky body and pudgy cheeks. He had this really dorky and curly mullet that you sometimes see bobbing up and down whenever he walks. It was funny, cute even, yet every time you see that face of his there's no denying the tingling sensation that always bubbled up inside your chest.

You would often think about if he ever knew your name. He probably did, you were sometimes called in class, but you weren't really optimistic. His mind often wanders when there were long, boring discussions. He would saddle his chin in an arm and stare at the windows, the ceiling, sometimes even at his desk whenever there was really nothing going on. Sometimes, you even wanted to offer him being a partner in one of the projects, but there's always one person that beat you to it.

Yes, you recalled there were one or two times he had asked you for a pencil, or a sheet of paper, but he never once did he call you by your name. You even remembered there was this one time when the class was taking a quiz, he had somehow managed to tap the edge of your desk without the teacher noticing, and he'd ask you for an answer in one of the questions. You said to him "no" because you knew it was cheating, but to be honest, you didn't actually know the answer to that one as well.

That funny story had a different side to it as well. It was the first time he ever looked at you with his eyes. The moment you met didn't count; his eyes were pointing somewhere else, even when he nodded

at you, so you didn't get to see them properly. But now, his eyes were there, looking to you. It was the bluest pairs you've ever seen. It was like the sky without any clouds on midday, totally devoid of anything that can mark it yet.

You fell in love with those eyes.

"Don't frown. You never know a girl might fall in love when you smile."

That sounded overly cheesy and desperate you almost wanted to scrap it away, but deep inside, you really couldn't help it. You get to be a teenager only once right? So young and in love, that was always the thought of your mind all those years ago. Also, it wouldn't hurt him anyway. You heard him only talked about it with his friends the first time you gave him one. They jeered him for it, but it was all harmless.

Thankfully, when you passed the note to the locker and he read it, Billy only coughed a short laugh and shook his head. Still, he had managed to place it on the same pocket he had once placed before.

Whenever you had a feeling that he was down a certain day, it would be always you who had words he could feast upon to jump start his mood. Eventually you noticed the light in his eyes every time he punched in the combination of his locker, hoping for a blue piece of paper would fall down, catching it just in the right time before it hits the ground.

Only to know that there was none waiting for him on other days. He obviously noticed the pattern too, it'd seemed. Whenever you knew he was feeling quite different, he would eventually make his way through the corridors before his first period, an almost desperate beat in his step. And there it was. You somehow just can tell by that that he knew.

In a couple of months, it fell into a routine. He felt better and there was a time that you didn't even have to send him one for at least more than a week. Before first period, you would always take a glimpse of him in the hallways and see if he was okay, and then store the memory when his face lights up when his friends comes over to greet him. You would learn about a few snippets of his personal life

when he talked about it whenever his buddies were there on his seat, or when you couldn't help but overhear them on a nearby bench you sat on lunch.

You often hear him light-heartedly complain about his dad dating this new girl with a daughter. He commented on how he was subjected to babysitting the kid, which would give his friends a couple of snickers around him. You couldn't help to hide your chuckle from that one as well. You'd never imagine that Billy was the babysitting kind either.

Before picking up the last book from your locker to bring home at the end of the day, you would hear Billy ask if he could stay with one of his friend's house for the night. It would earn him a couple of questions, but he'd just shrug it off saying that he really wants to spend time outside the house for a while.

You would often hear him talk about how he started doing exercising in a nearby gym back in his place. He wanted to set up one in his home, but it was too overly crowded and he naturally didn't have the funds yet to do so. Or when he dreamed about owning one of the latest Camaros for his 16th birthday. The ones that had a really deep engine and had a music player so he could listen to his CD's in full blast.

"I would drive it away from this place." Billy once said in melancholy. Then with a devious smirk he added. "And probably fuck all the chicks inside it."

You sometimes wouldn't know if he was really serious about it or not.

You didn't want to believe the rumors that's been starting to circle around him, because you knew underneath that rough surface was an imperfect gem. You surely didn't think that he was an open-arms kind of person. Him saying all those crude words was just a mask, an act over something he was trying to hide. You still kind of hoped that he would open it up to someone someday. Even if it wasn't you. You thought that he hadn't yet with his friends. Not with all the mindless laughing and teasing with each other.

"No Matter What – Badfinger"

You'd hoped that you would hear him playing this in his car that he dreamt of one day. You really didn't know what his choice of music were, and at that time, you had a poor taste in one. However, you heard this song playing on the radio one day and you wanted to share it with him. It certainly was a pick me up kind of song, even if particularly the lyrics wasn't meant for a boy.

Surprisingly, you would hear him humming the song absent-mindedly in his head over the next day.

And then there was that time. He was absent.

It was just like that, a sudden snap of a finger in your daily life and he just disappeared out of nowhere. You worried for him. He didn't exactly have the most pristine attendance, but at the same time, he was the type of person who had always been at school. You initially thought that he might be just late (he frequents that, by the way), but it grew on you worse when one of his friends actually asked *you* where he was in one of the classes you had with him. Of course you answered with nothing, but somehow, you couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong that day.

When last period was done, you'd somehow expect him to be there by his lockers, but he wasn't. You looked for him in the gym but he wasn't there also. The parking lot seemed to be an avid place for the varsity team to hang before going to their parties, but how foolish you were thinking there was hope. There wasn't.

You spend the rest of the night thinking if he would come back tomorrow.

And with a sigh of relief, thankfully he did. But not without remorse. He approached his locker with a small gauze pad taped right next to his left eyebrow. You wanted to muster up your courage to ask him what happened, but you knew that it was going to be answered by first period. When you sat by your desk and a few minutes he sat by his, he was immediately bombarded by the questions that you wanted to ask.

"Slipped into the floor. My dad..." He paused, trembling. "Brought me to a hospital to check if I was okay."

You breathed an internal sigh of relief. You may have been worried for all the wrong reasons, but at least everything's going to be fine after that.

It didn't, though.

"It's okay. Everyone deserves some rest. Even you. Spend that time with your family. I'm sure they care about you very much."

The moment second period bell rang, just enough a time for you to slide a slip of paper inside his locker and without him seeing, Billy had managed to shift through the hallways in a hurry to his locker. And there it was, a piece of blue paper that he immediately grabbed like a water on a desert sunlight.

He took his time reading it, something you found a little different that the last time. Usually you would actually see his eyes scrolling left through right quickly enough that he could finish it in just a second. Now it didn't.

But what surprised you the most was when he scoffed at it, looking at it in distaste. He then crumpled the note and threw it behind his shoulder, like a grain of salt too much that left his mouth sour.

You breathed out the air you held, and somehow, it was as if it carried away the heart from your body.

You really didn't know how to react. Was it something you said? Did you do anything wrong? Surely you were only thinking about how worried you are and you wanted to make things a little bit better for him. You forced yourself not to think about it that day and hoped that the next time it could've been better.

It didn't take too long though, apparently, his dampened mood carried over the next day, and you were sure what you'd write about him now.

"I'm sorry if I offended you. Just wanted to brighten up your day a little."

He didn't even try to unfold it. He just picked it up and threw it in the garbage. Now you felt worse. You were angry at him, even if technically there wasn't any reason to. You had a nonexistent

relationship. You were just a fly on the wall to him. He didn't even *want* to care. You thought of the possibility that there was something growing there, just a small thing that you cared for so much, but now you realized there wasn't anything there at all in the first place.

And he threw it all away.

Consequently, after that, his sudden magic of disappearing became a habit. Without any reason sometimes. You noticed he became a little more distant, just by the tells on how he goes about his day, becoming aloof over his surroundings, calling out his name more than one time before he would actually respond. But at the same time, there was... like this other side of him that made him more persistent with spending the day with his friends, practicing, playing basketball.

Soon after came the partying and the drinking.

You eventually started to hear rumors about Billy having one-night stands with some of the girls in school. You couldn't dispel it anymore like you used to before. And then a thought crept into your mind that maybe everything you've heard about him in the past could be true.

You knew he had his life, and there's no way in hell that you have any control over it. You have absolutely no right to tell him what and what not to do. Who were you in his life anyway? You were just some creepy stalker that would fantasize and obsess over him. Just like the hundreds of other girls in this school. You just so happen to be an invisible presence near him. Wanting to be talked, but never spoken to. It seemed painful enough to hear, but it was the truth, and you knew it deep down inside.

You knew the paper notes weren't going to work anymore. Sometimes, you couldn't even predict his moods as well. Most of the time, he hardly showed face. Just a straight, emotionless mask and an outer shell of appearance he wore while walking down the hallway. Also the fact that he threw away the paper last time you gave one to him, you felt intimidated by it and you somehow felt that you were denied to ever want to talk to him again.

Your admiration for him started to falter bit by bit because of that. The way he acted in front of you and then how helpless you were to try and stop him from going astray. You often wondered what happened to the silent boy you had once knew. You guessed the mystery wasn't there anymore, that was always the charm you'd like to have when you start to have feelings with someone. You wanted to believe that there was something behind that outer shell, and what's inside was the true Billy that was aching to be held. But he kept on building walls and more shells, that often times you think you would just give up. Whatever happened, whatever he once had, it was either not there anymore, or it was now secured in a cocoon that protected it from anyone who dare try to touch it.

You wished that someday you would talk to him about it. Make him believe that what he was doing was wrong, and nudge him to a direction— *anywhere*— just as long as it's not to where he's going. But, at that time, like fate deemed to have put it, you never really had the power to.

For some reason, your parents had a business venture and had to place themselves out of town. In some rural, faraway place called Hawkins, somewhere in Indiana. Of course, you stayed with your aunt in California because of your school, but a few weeks went by and you missed them. Luckily, you were given a choice if you could come to them and stay. You had but one decision, and you said yes.

"Remember to smile, Billy. At least, do it for yourself."

That was also how you wanted to cut the cord. A cord that wasn't supposed to be there to begin with.

Moving was by far one of the hardest things you've ever done with your life, but with moving comes a brand new start. It was hard for you from adapt city life into something more rustic and simple-fashioned, but Hawkins had a certain... mystical feeling to it. Something about the town makes it therapeutic. There were lesser worries here. Everything was quaint that you actually started to prefer hearing crickets and wildlife outside your room, and not the car horns and the smoke belches on your apartment window back in the city.

Your parents have accustomed to living on the peaceful town as well. They said it was just like the city, but without the traffic and the noise that somehow wasn't really healthy when they began to realize it.

The first few weeks were like that. Slowly trying to adapt to the things you have right now. Everything seemed to be changing for the better on your life, and the last thing that went with the flow, was you.

You wanted to change for the better. Especially when it comes to talking to people. You wanted to become more sociable without looking too desperate to fit in. Hawkins High was a different place, but filled with almost the same people. It was a little less difficult for you getting a whole new set of friends unlike in the city, everyone was a bit friendlier and tamer unlike the ones you've heard with High Schools in California.

Still, deep inside, the shy kid in you hadn't really left. You went to parties now, and somehow, you'd never imagined it could be fun and enjoyable. You would still prefer spending your Friday nights watching movies with a bowl of popcorn though or reading, that hadn't changed. However, growing up made you learn how to have fun every once in a while.

You also tried to dress more appropriately this time around. It's been long since you've ever touched denim overalls, and pretty much everything you have right now were skirts and dainty blouses. Your hair was neatly pulled back and tied with it were different clips or ribbons depending on the mood of your day. Makeup was something new to you as well. Luckily, your mother had thought you a few, humbling ways to do it, but not so much to over-highlight your natural face.

The last thing that you needed to change, was to let go over someone of your past. You still harbored some feelings for Billy, and he was never really far away from your thoughts, but the distance and not seeing him every day had become a numbing balm to help forget that he ever really existed. You weren't even together, and funnily enough, you really had thought of the world with him back then.

Were you really that obsessed by some middle-school boy? Thinking about it now, it seemed like an embarrassing story you would tell your kids someday, and you would imagine how flustered your reaction would be by all of it.

Yet, time and experience comes with learning. And you learned that what you did with him didn't really matter. All those notes, those words that ached in your heart, yearning for them to be released, he didn't deserve any of it. Somehow, you felt thankful that it didn't went anything farther than that.

And finally, you're glad to have let that feeling go.

Weeks turned to months and then a year, and time went by faster as you reached High School, and at some point in between, you felt like that you've finally settled in Hawkins. Your parents did too. Their business became a permanent one, and they eventually quit their jobs and fully focused their efforts on managing their own small enterprise.

And it seems that you were going to stay happy for a long time.

Until, well... When a hurricane happened.

A/N: Woop. Yep. That's it for part 1. Part 2 I promise will be posted sometime next week. This story needs a little bit of internalizing so I just want you guys to absorb all the info here, because the next part is where things REALLY hit the fan (I hope). Hope you guys also stay until then!

Review

Follow, fave if you like it.

2. Chapter 2

A/N: I kinda forgot to mention that there will be just a smidge amount of language, themes, a bit of a homophobic dad in the 70s, and self-harm? I think all of those are not too prominent, but I've lain out the warning just in case. You should know that this would happen, you clicked on a Billy fic for goodness sake.

Anyway, have fun and here's to hoping a tissue or two is used for your emotions!

You were absolutely stumped when you heard along the grapevine that a "Billy Hargrove" was enrolling at Hawkins High.

You never really had thought for the life of you that you would ever meet him again. Along the intermission of your life in California and him arriving, it had been going so very well already. There was at one point that his name had completely disappeared from your reality. You realized that as you were growing older, thoughts of infatuations and longing in the hallways slowly became a foreign thing to you. You knew there was really nothing about it, and it was just mild crush that made you all poetic and mushy inside. That part of your life was over now. Like an embarrassing story that you feared you might tell at a drunken stupor.

Now...

You chuckled to yourself as to why fate seemed to have played a cruel part in this. You even wanted to backhand your past self for introducing yourself to that boy in the first place.

But there he was, Billy Hargrove. He entered the campus grounds like a bat out of hell— music blaring and the tires of his car screeching against the pavement. His car. The one that you heard he always gushed on about when you were five inches shorter. He parked, and a small girl skipped out of the driver's seat, climbed on her skateboard and rolled on over to the Middle School campus.

And then he got out.

The knowing face you had shelved in your memory all those years ago came gushing down like a waterfall.

And he... was totally different now.

Like the time you underwent transformation, apparently, he wasn't far off the bat too. Gone was the Billy Hargrove you had once knew. He had entirely changed now. He even looked *good*.

He was now very lean unlike before, with his clothing so tight that it showed some of the muscles curving on his body. His cheeks didn't look pudgy anymore, his jaw was chiseled, his face was firmer and more prominent. He sported a new facial hair, a small patch of a growing moustache along his upper lip. His mullet-style even changed. It wasn't the curly brown you'd see bobbing up and down the hallways anymore, it was wavier and more stylish, like the ones you see singers in rock-bands usually sport. He was also taller now, and had a gait that oozed personality and self-confidence. No more of those sluggish walks with his shoulders sagging his body.

And his smirk. God, that smirk. It had evolved into something entirely different now. It was more smug and confident, and gosh *darn it*, you had to admit, it was *sexy*.

But everything...

You couldn't help but frown at that.

You didn't know why seeing him like that made you feel the total opposite of what you're supposed to expect. There was once that inkling in your mind that you were kind of excited to meet him again, but that totally dissipated the moment he entered the hallway with that swagger and pride. It would seem like there was an entirely different reason for you not to speak with him this time.

Billy Hargrove was no longer the silent boy whom you've once fell in love with.

With that declaration, fate seemed to follow the tune that you had strung. The first time you crossed paths with him after so many years, there wasn't really anything that re-ignited your interest. You just

passed by the hallway, and he continued on his way. No bumps. No apologies. Nothing.

You sat by your desk, but your friends have already taken the seats beside you. Classes passed by and you started to notice that he wasn't in any of your classes. Maybe he didn't want to. You thought of the few details of his life before you moved away. In those last days, you hardly ever saw him in class anymore. Only a seat that was empty and a name being called by the teacher with an empty response. It was either that, or you knew he skipped with some of his friends to do whatever stuff he did back then.

Finally, your locker was two hallways away from his.

You were relieved that it was that way.

Billy wasn't worth your time to be mulled upon to begin with. You had classes. Even though you were somehow glad to see him again, there's just probably little to no chance of you two ever speaking to each other anyway. He changed, and so did you. You weren't that silly little girl anymore that would pine for Billy Hargrove each time you saw him.

Not anymore.

You went about your day after that. Classes, lunch, tests, P.E., everything happened as usual and nothing really exciting happened during the course of that week besides Billy going to Hawkins High.

It was only until the week after that you somehow had Billy under your radar again. Even though it was just common knowledge, you started to hear rumors about Billy getting into the basketball team with ease, supposedly beating out the current star which was this guy named Steve Harrington. You weren't really surprised about that. Before, you knew he was good, so you wouldn't really put it past him if he dominated the varsity team on this side of the world.

However, it was the next story that churned the feelings in your stomach. There was some party that happened during the weekend. You weren't really able to go there and you just had to base everything off of speculations, but apparently Billy had gotten a date

with the prettiest girl in school, Stephanie Perkins. She was really popular around your town, but she was veritably known for the many guys she stood up and the fewer who she had wrapped around her finger, only for her to cut them down like some game she plays.

And if she said yes to Billy, you definitely knew he would just be another boy who got his heart broken pining for her.

It wasn't necessarily true when I arrived Monday morning.

Apparently, there had been talks going around that Billy had another girl slinked on his arm when he cruised along the hallway. Stephanie was pretty pissed off at that. It didn't even take the first period before you heard a loud argument coming a few feet over your locker.

"You obviously didn't notice how much you *enjoyed* moaning my name last night!" Stephanie Perkins, flushed in anger and... embarrassment? Who knew she could crow openly in front of the public like that, for everyone to see and hear.

Billy just looked at her and stifled a grin.

"Stop kidding yourself. You were a lame fuck anyway."

That was how Stephanie Perkins got flushed back into the depths. How Billy Hargrove had slowly climbed the ranks to take over the school for his notoriousness. And how it cemented your entire perspective of him that you've tried to deny.

Billy Hargrove now had gone a complete and total three-sixty.

You never really thought that the day would happen, but it did. It started off with Stephanie Perkins, and then the next thing you knew he had beaten up this other teenager who just looked at him the wrong way while he was lighting up a stick. He went through all the parties and drank all the beers, leaving him sloshed until one of his friends try to haul his ass over his car and leave him there for God knows what hour.

You even saw it with your own eyes once or twice.

It was a pity really. You saw him saw high above the clouds—

sometimes even literally— and you really couldn't tell what lies ahead in his future. Did he even have one?

Then started the thoughts that slowly crept in your head. It wasn't about infatuation; it wasn't even curiosity or worry that had made you want to slip back into his life again. You just... you knew you had to be there. Watching. Like everything you did all those years ago. You really couldn't tell the reason why you wanted to do it, but you felt like you needed to be close just for the sake of it.

And so you did.

But this time, there were no notes. No shy glances over the end of the hallways or staring longingly at him for minutes until he had moved on. You sat a desk in one edge of the room and he sat by his on the other side. You didn't want to force yourself to hear conversations when people talk about him, but if you were there— well, you were there.

Unlike before, you never really found out anything new. It was always the same thing: Drinking, partying, basketball. Fucking girls. You even heard Billy mention it like it was some casual thing for him. Like an everyday ritual he needed to do. He never mentioned anything important, except maybe his stepsister once. Said that she was crap. But nothing else. Not even how he seems to take good care of his car, or the music he listens to everyday. Not even his family.

No amount of progress had ever been done until it happened one Friday afternoon.

"Not tonight." He said, talking to Tommy H. "Family thing. See you Monday."

You found yourself curious at that, but then you got suddenly snagged by one of your friends and study partner for some project in one of your classes. She said that both of you needed to discuss a few things over before starting. You proposed to do it on your house but she said that she was craving for some milkshakes and fries. Luckily enough, there was a diner somewhere in Hawkins that served her favorite.

You arrived at the Ted's Diner with your friend around 5. You had rung the household telling you where you were and the specified time when your parents would pick you up, and then the both of you started with a pair of the food and a booth in one of the corners of the quaint place. Surprisingly, it didn't take too long for the both of you to finish out the initial part of your project ideas. You had some stuff already planned out and you both assigned each other what to do with what tasks.

Of course, even after all that time, you stayed for a while and talked over menial things. When it was getting dark, you knew your friend was about to be picked up any minute, and by the time your friend's parents arrived, you had already finalized everything both of you needed to do.

They had offered you a ride home, but you didn't want to impose. Their house was on the other side of town opposite to yours, and you didn't want to trouble them. Plus, when you rang the phone at your house again, it didn't answer. It probably meant that your parents were on their way too.

You decided to wait it out in the diner. The place was quiet anyway, besides the record player humming in the background. It could be a slow night to them you assumed. There were only a few people you could count in one hand that were inside the place. Them including you and the waitress, and some of the staff behind the kitchen.

Until the doorbell chimed.

You noticed that a family had entered the diner. But it wasn't just any family.

It was the Hargroves.

You could already tell which parent belongs to which child. Offensive, but it was the first thing you've thought of the first time you saw the whole family. There was the father, Neil you had recalled in one of Billy's conversations. He looked very stern, sharp eyes always have some glint in them that observes his surroundings. Like some sort of military person. There were features that both Billy and him shared, like their height and posture, although seeing Billy

he was more lax... and annoyed, maybe? Billy really felt like he wasn't supposed to be there.

The women were stark different with the men of the Hargrove family. The mother had a more calming demeanor, dainty and quiet— she almost reminded you of... well, you. She was quite pretty that went along gracefully at her age (even if you couldn't really tell), and you almost felt like you would somehow grow up to be exactly like her someday.

The only thing that they shared with her daughter was their auburn hair. Aside from that, she was a totally different person. She had this more of a tomboyish side in her with the baggy jacket and jeans. You also felt like she was rebellious, but it was ever tamer than with his stepbrother. However, if Billy looked annoyed, then you couldn't even tell what was going through her mind. She almost felt awkward, and she also wanted to leave any minute. But something the way she scrunches up the freckles on her face makes it feel like she was forced to stay.

And then there was Billy. He looked pretty good— Smartly dressed with a buttoned shirt and untattered jeans, but he really couldn't resist topping it all off with one of his signature leather jackets. His hair still sported the curly mullet, but it felt like there was less effort put to it than the times he always flaunted it for all the school to see.

Looking longer than you should've been, you turned your head towards your booth again and minded your own business.

But that didn't really matter as you heard a couple of footsteps headed toward your direction.

You heard them sat exactly behind the booth you were in. You were surprised. The place was practically empty and they could've decided on anywhere else besides somewhere near you. But they just *had* to pick that one out.

"Now I know you kids want to be off somewhere else, but your mother and I decided if we could make this into a family thing." Neil had opened up while they were settling into their seats. You could practically hear the stepsiblings mutter a sigh of anguish at the

remark.

And Billy was there, sat directly behind you.

"Is this gonna be like, every Friday night?" The stepsister asked.

"Of course it would be." Neil answered, there was a short pause. "This would also stop you from doing whatever it is you've been doing every Friday night."

He must be pointing at Billy.

"Great." The victimized teen answered with a hint of tone.

A waitress came with a menu and they called out their orders. You were just there silently tapping your fingers and glancing at the clock on your wrist every few seconds. It felt like you were trapped. You wanted to get off the booth, but where would you go? Go to another seat? Sounds a bit disrespectful to them, so you really didn't have much of a choice.

"How is school coming along?" Neil had asked while they were waiting for their food.

The stepdaughter first spoke up. "It's good. I've been making friends, I guess."

"Good, good..." Again, there was a pause. "And..?"

"Yeah, whatever." Billy grumbled.

"Speak up, boy. I didn't hear you very clearly."

"I said it's *fine* dad."

The raised voice caught you off-guard. Initially, you had thought that you weren't supposed to hear this conversation, but no it's getting into a whole new level of awkward. You couldn't help but tilt your head a little towards their direction.

Neil had caught you staring, only for a fraction of a second, until the stepmom placed a hand on his shoulder.

"It's okay, honey. Maybe he's just a little tired."

The stepmom was trying to pacify the situation, it'd seemed.

"You're right, Susan. Maybe he just is." Neil spoke in a controlled tone. The air had gotten heavier, like the place had somehow gotten denser with a crowd, even if the place was particularly empty.

You looked at the time again, not really knowing what to do. Where were they? You decided it was the perfect opportunity for you to move away from the booth so you could use the diner's phone. It rang and rang, but nobody answered. Breathing out a sigh of defeat, you placed it down again and thanked the staff profusely for letting you use their phone.

You decided to switch into a different seat, not letting you want to hear the rest of the conversation they're having. It felt like you were intruding, and you wanted to respect their privacy as much as you could.

But you can't help but think about their standing between with each other. The family when you initially had seen them, they looked like your average, ordinary one. But there was something nagging in you that it might not have been what you'd expected. You would occasionally spare a glance at Billy, and he looked distraught. His posture was stiff while he crossed his arms, looking at the window by his seat instead of the quiet chatter that was going around them.

It only took a while before they received their food, and thankfully it was hummed silence again after that. You looked at the time again. Your knee started bobbing up and down. Somehow, you thought about the offer your friend did earlier, and it got you thinking if you should've accepted it in the first place.

"YOU WILL NOT GO TO THAT PARTY."

The gruff voice had thrown you off guard after a couple of minutes of silence, and your head immediately snapped towards its direction. Neil had already stood up from his side of the booth, his face fuming red with anger. You were a couple of seats away from them, but you had heard the whole thing.

"It's Tommy's birthday next week, dad. I have to be there!" Billy this time, shouted at the opposite side of the table.

You recalled quickly in your memory and you were definitely sure it wasn't Tommy B's birthday next week.

"Don't you ever raise your tone at me, kid." Neil's eyes were now seething.

"Neil, stop—"

"I did what I had to, okay? I cancelled *all* my plans tonight just for me to be in this stupid—"

"Get. Out."

It was then you saw the very first time in your life, something you'd never deem for Billy to ever have.

You had felt the fear in Billy's eyes.

"You didn't hear me, boy?"

"Neil, we're in a public place—"

"Then we'll have to make our talk a little more private." Neil cut off his wife.

The staff had already popped out of their hole and they had already gathered in attention towards the family. Neil was switching his eyes between them and then to Billy, as if he was really trying not to cause a ruckus inside the place.

"When I walk out through that door, I expect you to be a man and follow me, you got it?"

There was a pregnant silence. Billy's face contorted with no emotion, but his eyes were brimming close to tears.

"Got it, sir." He replied expectantly.

Neil had pulled off his wallet and placed the money on the table. He

then slowly exited the booth, and out the door with his steps echoing off the walls of the diner.

"Fuck." Billy muttered. He slowly paced around, rubbing his face flushed with anger. You finally realized by now the reason why he was prone to lashing out. It didn't sit too well on you the idea why, but this...

It was all too much.

The ladies were just stumped as well, and by a couple of moments they eventually stood up and apologized to the staff with what happened. Billy had also left after the whole commotion and there was a kick in your system for the urge to follow.

In your peripherals, the daughter had eyed you with concern, telling you as if "not to do it", but the doorbell chimed as you exited into the quiet night.

You looked left and right, but it seemed like the both of them were nowhere to be found. The parking lot was empty save for what look like the Hargrove's car, but they weren't there. That was until you heard a slight crash on your left, and then you immediately went to the corner of the diner.

There were hushed whispers, but when you got closer, the words had gotten clearer. You peeped slightly around the corner, and there you saw Neil, his hands clasped at the leather jacket of Billy, almost lifting him up in the air.

"I got it." Billy muffled.

"I got it, *sir*." Neil emphasized.

Billy chanted the same mantra.

"Good, at least that's clear. Now, repeat after me: respect and responsibility."

"Respect and responsibility." Billy chanted emotionlessly again.

"Good. Now, if you expect to get in the car with the family, you have

another thing coming. I want to stick it to your faggot brain the consequences of your action. If you badly want to be with your friends tonight, then go ahead, but expect the doors to be locked when you go home."

Neil pushed him to the wall one more time then let him go. Neil had sauntered off already towards your direction, but you snapped your head back and hid behind one of the garbage bins. Thankfully it was dark out and Neil didn't notice your presence.

A few minutes went by and you heard Billy was screaming behind the diner, tossing cans and thumping the walls with his fist. The rest of the Hargrove family had eventually filed out as well, getting into the car and then driving out into the road.

How could this be? You never knew someone who went through this kind of experience before. This was something you'd only see in news reports in tv shows, but never in real life. Never in this quaint town of Hawkins.

You got out of your hiding spot and you had finally revealed yourself to Billy. The first time, the first ever conversation you'd like to have with him... you'd hoped it wasn't supposed to be this way.

Billy was pacing back and forth between the pavement, just like what he exactly did inside the diner. The faint light from the windows had shined his cracked knuckles that was covered in blood. You could see his face flushed, not with alcohol, but tears you never expected to be there in the first place.

His chin had looked up, and he was staring at you with those blue eyes.

The once eyes you thought of the sky, now it was the deepest trench inside a stormy ocean.

"Seen all of that, huh?" Billy chuckled, his arms flung wide as if it was his magician's final trick. "Shit. The future king of this stupid excuse of a town is a piece of shit."

You didn't know how to exactly respond with that. This was Billy.

The Billy. The one person who thought of himself like he was sky-high untouchable. The person you thought who didn't care about the blazing trail he left when he crossed paths with almost everything. He was everything— but now he looked like nothing. *Less* than nothing.

And he broke down.

"So, what now? You gonna tell on everyone?" He said.

"No."

A scoff escaped his throat. "I guess the quiet girl *do* know how to stay quiet."

There was a furrow in your brows. What did he mean by that?

Billy saw you react and it seemed priceless. "Yeah, I fucking know you. I've remembered you back in California."

Your eyes grew wide as saucers.

"You were also that chick who kept on giving me those stupid notes." He then added. "I've seen you slipping one on my locker one time."

You couldn't understand it. You were sure he wasn't anywhere near when you did it. You double— no, triple-checked. But then again, it was in the past. You felt somewhat relieved that he admitted that, at least there's no reason for you to hide from him anymore.

"Why didn't you talk to me then?" You then said.

"The fuck like I know you. You might be some psycho-bitch or something."

The curses were ringing in your head. It sure did popped a vein or two, but again, you're trying so hard to maintain your composure.

"I remembered you used to like them."

You did. You saw that face. You remembered how he lit up and how he cherished it like some frail little thing. You remembered how he

carefully placed it under one of the many pockets of his cotton jacket back then. You knew. And judging by his face, he wasn't denying it either.

And like a snap, it all changed. "Yeah well, it's the only thing that kept me going through those days."

Billy said it. Billy had said *that*. The words echoed in your ears. It was something very unheard of, something, again, you never thought to have come out from his mouth.

There was nothing but background silence. The surroundings were a mess. Tossed bins and scrapped plastics. The wall behind the diner was plastered with faint marks of red. Billy stayed emotionless; his eyes barely glistening from the fresh memory that happened only a couple of minutes ago, trying to reel it all in.

"You didn't know what it felt like to be me." He said it like he was being accused. "I didn't fuck up my life, everyone else did. My dad, Susan, that stupid daughter of hers Max... My mom..."

He stifled the tears that were just begging to be released. But he paused and he stayed silent. He didn't want to finish those words that needed to come out, but you understood.

"You're wrong." He then uttered.

A question brew in your mind, but he had already beaten you to it.

"If you're thinking that I'm some broken thing you can fix, then go find some other helpless piece of shit out there." Billy spat. "If you thought that notes and letters are all it takes for me to get better, it's not going to happen. We're not little kids anymore."

You can't help your lips to form a little grin. "That's exactly what I would've said. We're not little kids anymore. We're also not exactly in California anymore, Billy. I've grown, and you've grown. And we're both at the opposite ends of the world and..."

Everything changed. I fell out of love from you. You are completely different now. There were so many things you would've wanted to say to him, but you let the thoughts flutter through the wind. You

couldn't help but to feel sad at the melancholy. This could've been the perfect moment when lovers run into each other's arms and comforting them. But it wasn't. It was just two distant acquaintances who barely knew each other.

"I won't force myself into your life now just because I suddenly knew everything. It's still *your* life." You treaded the field of broken glasses. Everything felt so sensitive at this point. One wrong thing to say and he might disappear forever, trapped in his own twisted oblivion. "We could still walk along the hallways at school and act like neither one of us exists. Act like nothing had ever happened and we go on with our lives. You go what you do, and I do mine... Deal?"

Billy stared at you for so long, you could actually see the gears in his head grinding. You really wondered what he was thinking about. For someone who had to undertake so much, you definitely would see the reason why Billy himself acted like he was his own blaze of glory. The Icarus that was already burning on the sky. It was always like his head was always driving a hundred miles an hour and never would seem to stop.

Feeling already being glared enough for a copious amount of time, you had already thought he wouldn't answer. And he didn't, and that was when the awkward silence first started.

"My ride's coming in a few minutes. Do you want a ride home?" You suddenly ventured.

"No, but if you can take me to Tommy and Carol's, that'll be better." Billy answered.

"Ok. Sure."

You were about to turn around, almost ready and willing to forget about the whole incident, when you saw Billy took a step forward.

"Why?"

Your lips had formed a small, reassuring grin. You didn't really need to ask the reason for the question. Somehow, in the back of your head, you already knew what you were going to say.

"Maybe one day, I would get to see the old Billy again. The one that I had a crush with since middle school," you fished out a handkerchief in the pocket of my skirt. "And then I'll tell him I don't love him anymore." You offered the small cloth, not even bothering with the answer you've just given. "Here, wipe yourself with it, you look like a mess."

He accepted it, but his mouth was slightly parted, as if he was floored. Your lips stretched into a gentle smile this time as you turned around and left him to muse. Thankfully he didn't follow after you, because when you entered back at the diner, you suddenly felt like all the energy had left you, and you breathed out a huge sigh of relief.

You didn't notice it until now, but you saw your legs trembling. It was almost as weak as jelly and you actually had to brace yourself from the doors in order for you to maintain balance. Your entire body felt almost heated up, like you had just run a marathon, but you weren't obviously sweating. Was everything you just did pure adrenaline rush? It was a euphoric feeling, yet it only lasted only for a moment until the after-effects had drained you fully.

You waited until a minute or two until you had finally maintained composure. And you had already sat back to where you were. One of the staff had politely asked you regarding what happened, but you mentioned that the issue was private. They didn't try to push you after that.

After another minute, Billy had returned. He still had looked flushed, but he was a little better. It was like he had fallen off to another drunken stupor but you clearly knew he wasn't, and so you ignored it altogether. He had managed to sit in front of you, but he didn't even utter a word. He was also looking elsewhere, like he was almost ashamed to be with you. You didn't bother with it of course, as you probably knew he had gone through his worse times.

You almost enjoyed the silence, and wish you could've spent time with him like this a little more, but eventually your parents had finally arrived.

You introduced Billy as your project partner— an eventful excuse to

say the least— and he had offered to stay with you until your ride came. Your parents were of course ecstatic with the proper gentleman, and they too politely asked if they could offer him a ride somewhere.

Both of you got in the backseat of the car and no sooner you had already drove off into the streets of Hawkins in the dim night. Your parents would occasionally ask questions here and there, but mostly everything was simply radio silence. When Billy pointed out the street where Tommy lived, he'd just asked if he could be dropped off right there instead of "his" house. Your parents insisted, but Billy had somehow won them over.

You thought it was just some excuse as to not see the house full of toilet rolls and music full-blast on the cold night air.

Billy said his "thank-you's" and had left the car, walking lonely on the street until his figure disappeared on the shadows of the street lights.

"He seems like a nice, quiet kid." Your father mused.

You couldn't help but laugh.

"Yeah, he is dad."

Weekend came by and it was pretty much uneventful as you expected it to be. It was leagues from everything that you did that Friday night, but at least it was a nice reprieve from everything that had happened. Surprisingly enough, you couldn't help but think about Billy in some of your quieter moments now that you saw him at a different light. Yeah, you had thought that maybe it was just that one time where his father blew a fuse at him, but the way he reacted to it seemed like it really wasn't.

It somehow got you contemplating as well, about all the puzzles that slowly seem to fit upon the realization of it all. You kind of understood now why he was so rebellious against the world like it owed him everything he didn't have. How everything else was so fickle in the way he perceives it. How booze and cigarettes and sex were the only thing that kept him from the edge. You finally

understood, and all you could ever really do was empathize. Not necessarily pity.

Because it really felt like the world *did* owe him everything. You guessed if he was granted another life, he never would've chosen this. You knew he wanted out, he wanted to drive in his car and forget everything ever existed and leave his rotten past behind. You remembered that moment, all those years ago. His past-self wanted to know what it truly meant to be free, not the gilded illusion he now had.

He was stuck. He couldn't do anything except cling to a rope that was on the verge of snapping.

He'd changed. He had changed so much that nobody ever really knew him anymore. You wanted to say that you did, but who were you kidding? Sure, you were the only wallflower that had ever listened to him. All his doubts and secrets, things that his other friends would and wouldn't know. Things that his family would and wouldn't know. All of that knowledge, it made you feel like you had power over his entire future. It felt like you were the only one that can save him.

To be another rope for him to hold on to.

But you knew it was going to be really complicated. You wanted to help, but you made a promise to him. Despite everything that has been shifting in his life, you wanted to be that constant. You knew each other, but it's never going to amount to anything. You'd only just stay there and listed, and away from the forest-fire that was Billy Hargrove.

And so the eventful Monday came and you breathed out a small sigh as you entered the school doors with your books hugged against your chest. You entered the hallways as usual and you were greeted by your friends shortly before they walked into their own classes. You passed by Billy's locker but he wasn't there. You also would've expected someone should've started some conversation about him right about now, but there also weren't. There was a slight inkling of worry that crept within you when you thought if he wasn't going to come to school today, but you force yourself not to think about it that much.

You arrived at your locker and you opened it.

A piece of paper, blue, fell softly down at the ground. Your heart almost skipped a beat.

You picked it up and unfolded it.

"No deal."

Immediately your head spurned towards your surroundings, the hallway seemed so busy with all the students that passed by your sight, but there was one person that was looking at you while he was casually leaning in one of the lockers, him seemingly had forgotten that Tommy and Carol were there talking with each other.

Your eyes and his locked together, and you saw him wear an almost expressionless face. He wasn't grinning nor he was glaring at you intently. He was just there, waiting for you to answer.

He saw you fold the paper, and placed it in one of the many pockets of your bag. He knew he didn't need anything else after from you after.

And because of that, you had thought, maybe there was a little bit of hope after all.

A/N: Welp, that's it, I guess. And no, if you're asking for this to be continued, it's definitely not going to be. However I ensure you I'm not done yet gushing this bad-boy just yet, so let's see if I could make another story or two for him in the future! :3

What do you think?

Review, like, follow

if you like